

Institute in the Yukon By Mrs. William Hough

WHAT HAPPENS when a woman is moved to the north with her husband, whose job it is to help develop the country in a field he is capable, trained or educated for? When one is transported from a modern way of living to take up residence in the north where radio reception is limited, there is no TV and the daily newspaper is not available, it is quite a change to those who are assigned or have accepted the challenge of pioneering our North country.

Most women of this Ontario area do not have to consider a 100 mile trip to buy groceries, to take Junior to the dentist, or for an appointment at the Doctor's when expecting a baby. We can dash out to the corner store and pick up the sugar required to finish icing the cake. We do not have to plan what quantities to buy to last over a nine month period before the spring break-up—our forgetfulness can be remedied at our next trip to the supermarket.

The women of Haines Junction, Mile 1016 along the Alaska Highway, gathered together with the desire to form some sort of a women's group where they could swap recipes, brighten their lives a little by getting together over a cup of coffee and work for the common good. After studying several organizations they decided they liked the aims and objects of the Women's Institute. Their primary objective is to improve conditions of rural life, so that settlement may be permanent and prosperous. "For Home and Country" is their motto and the FWIC feels it has much to offer the homemaker in the remote areas of the North where family homes are increasing in numbers and the pioneer stages of the country are becoming a reality.

The impressive record of accomplishments by this group started with a talk on "Gardening in the Yukon" given by the agronomist at the Experimental Farm of that area. Members began to make gardens that spring which is quite a feat in the Yukon. An open meeting was arranged with a speaker on "Education for the Yukon!" Community interest was sparked and a new school applied for. This was built and in operation by the following year. A library was started from the proceeds of catering to a wedding, another service to the community by the group. Much labour, material and books were donated for the library when it was found that the women meant business. The first Handicraft Exhibit and Fall Fair for children and adults took place last fall, which included classes from pre-school colouring to men's baking, as well as hobbies and a pet show. Another project was showing films to children on Saturday afternoons with a series of comic and educational types from the National Film Board, this was particularly valuable in bringing to the children knowledge of life "outside." Many of the children in the north have never seen a train or farms or industries or had any idea what a postman was until they saw them in a film. Another Women's Institute member held a story hour to

promote the use of the books in the library by the children.

For fun the women organized a Ladies Curling Bonspiel during the winter, with six teams composed of all the local women. A play "Frontier Females" was staged and the audience was amused with the rugged ways of female hunting. A Sourdough Shindig was organized to celebrate Yukon's Jubilee Anniversary with refreshments of home baked beans and sourdough bread. Proceeds bought a propane stove for the Community Hall which was redecorated with curtains and new gingham tablecloths for the many tables used for special occasions. Quilt material was given to the branch and is now being made up for a raffle. The ten provincial flowers were done in applique and the quilt is being quilted in a maple leaf design.

A programme was planned to aid the Indians in the area. To attract the Indian women, refreshments of tea and cookies or cake were served to follow the hour of instruction which made a pleasant gathering for the women and also encouraged them to return again for the following meetings which would inform them of Nutrition, Child Care, Personal Hygiene, Communicable Diseases, etc. A public health nurse co-operated by giving instruction on Sanitation and cleanliness. This meant that she must show them how to sterilize baby bottles, prepare a formula, bathe the baby; also the importance of washing diapers by improvising and using utensils that the Indians would have in the camp. The one stew pot, river water and lack of proper utensils created much difficulty, but also proved the importance and necessity of the demonstrations or lectures.

Much of the work done by the Women's Institute group in the Yukon is intangible, the lonely child is being aided and opportunities presented to him which are not otherwise offered in a country yet undeveloped. Through the various study kits, hobby crafts and homemaking information available through the Women's Institute organization, the mother and homemaker in the north can help others while being helped herself.

The Indian and Eskimo are in need of friendly assistance in their new adjustment in changing to a modern civilized life and homemakers are in need of company, an outside interest and an opportunity of acquiring information and developing techniques and skills in homemaking to help them in performing their daily tasks, in meeting personal family and community needs, and to assist them with their personal growth and development.

A resolution was passed at the last National meeting of the F.W.I.C. asking for support in extending the Women's Institute into these regions and it is hoped some assistance will be given in this tremendous undertaking. If the Department of Northern Affairs does contribute to this endeavour it would be a great stride taken in the future of our Northlands.